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ABSTRACT

The importance of the library in education today is such that one should deplore the mentality which places a higher priority on athletics than on the development of an adequate, to say nothing of an exciting and imaginative, library facility. An adequate library has a pot of coffee, a formalized library skills program, materials and equipment to meet curriculum needs, and staffing to write personalized curriculum for any teacher who needs it. The perfect library should have a sense of mystery and imagination about it. A student entering should be announced by an English doorman while an eight foot Chinese gong is sounded. Van Gogh walking the corridors, a tropical rain forest, an egg collection, the Louvre, and magical windows to the Old West, to rural America 100 years ago, and to a large city (all populated with real people) should all be included in the design. Accepting the premise of administrative priorities places limits on the imagination, but an adequate library should provide for the needs of the educational process and encourage children to keep their dreams. (TJ)

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The Library - Heart of Reading

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If the library is the heart of reading, I'm afraid reading has been the victim of a cardiac arrest. School libraries are fading into the mists of the fossil lands. They are the victims of a mesozoic mentality that gives the heart of reading top priority to be offered to the budget gods at the administrative altar. School libraries are being phased out with their incredible potential and their invaluable services.

In the last several years California has received national recognition for several of its exemplary school libraries from the American Association of School Librarians. While the recognition is well deserved, it tends to distort the general quality of our libraries. A few parhelic circles reflecting the saintly virtues of a few members of the crowd, won't get the crowd canonized.

In eleven years, E.S.E.A., Title II, provided over $100,000,000.00 to about 350 schools in California. The objective was to convert substandard libraries into multi-media type facilities that could serve as models worthy of being imitated. Today, less than 35 (or 10%) can be considered to be still fulfilling the districts' commitments to Title II. Few have expanded their original collections and facilities or, for that

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matter, even maintained the equipment and materials. Of this small percentage, less than half a dozen can be considered to be exemplary.

If the Title II libraries are suffering from a drop in blood pressure, the non-federally funded school libraries must be in need of a pacer wired to a 12 volt battery. They must be unconscious.

An adequate library is an expensive proposition. In times of the financial crunch, the arts, special academic programs and school libraries are among the first casualties. Athletics are the last. Reading will go before football.

Professor H. M. Wogglebug T. E., the director of the Royal Athletic College of Oz, in L. Frank Baums' book The Emerald City of Oz, solved the problem of priorities quite conveniently. He had the wizard invent "School Pills". (1:96)

There were pills for all the academic disiplines, Latin pills, math pills, geography and grammar pills. A dose in the morning and a dose at night. They were most effective and saved a lot of time otherwise wasted in study that could be better employed in practicing athletics.

"You see", declares the Wogglebug, "my students are never obliged to interrupt their games to acquire the lesser branches of learning".

"It's a great invention, I'm sure", said Dorothy, looking admiringly at the Wizard, who blushed modestly at this praise.

"We live in an age of progress", announced Professor Wogglebug pompously. "It is easier to swallow knowledge then to acquire it laboriously from books. Is it not so, my friends?"

"Some folks can swallow anything", said Aunt Em. (2:98)

By remaining impassive to this trend of the diminishing library, we are also remaining impassive to the diminishing returns that follow as a result of administrative budget cuts. Aunt Em was right. If we swallow this premise of priorities, we'll swallow anything.

More money is not the answer. The school library is the heart of the learning process, including reading. A commitment by the district to that concept is a commitment to improve the local system based on an adequate library.

The primary reason for a school's existence is to pass on the information of the life experience to those who are to live new lives and participate in the social scheme. Libraries house the record of man's achievements, his struggle, his ingenuities and his fantasies.

School curriculums should reflect the mechanics of living and deal with the interactions of individuals and groups within society.

An adequate school library should serve all phases of the school. It should be the center for social gatherings for children and adults and never be without a fresh pot of coffee.

It should meet the childrens curriculum needs and the materials and equipment should be extensive enough to meet these needs.

There should be adequate staffing to write personalized curriculums from one page, to a hundred for any teacher that needs it.

There should be scheduled classroom visits <u>just</u> for story telling.

There should be a formalized library skills program in every school, at every level, in every district.

The community should be involved in the use of the library as well as volunteering to help their children in it.

Perhaps more than anything, the library environment must project a certain uniqueness that can be found no where else in the school.

A simple but effective test of this sense of uniqueness is to walk into the center of any school library and make one 360° visual sweep of the room. If nothing in particular catches your eye, and you feel as

though the room ascribes to the "if you've seen one you've seen them all" impression, then you probably have.

There should be a sense of mystery, of not being able to see it all, curiosity, wonder, and a sense of life. It must be a people place.

It should be as Lord Chesterfield said in Letters to His Son, "Learning is acquired by reading books; but the much more necessary learning, the knowledge of the world, is only to be acquired by reading men, and studying all the various editions of them." (3:80)

If I were to design a school library it would be in the exact geographical center of the campus. This is what it would be like.

The single entrance (except for the secret passage near the fireplace) would have two 14 foot bronze doors. Each would weigh 6 tons. Every square inch would be covered with scenes from the old testament.

Every time a child walked in, his name would be formally announced by an English doorman, a butler would take his lunch box and coat, and an 8 foot Chinese gong would be struck by a 400 lb. Mongolian Tartar.

There would be a tropical rain forest with screaming spider monkeys and strange jungle noises vibrating in the treetops. Little signs would remind the children not to wander off the paths. No Disney plastic allowed. Real 36 foot anacondas.

An egg collection would fill a dusty corner along with donations from the well meaning. The Louvre Palace would be there and the childrens drawings would hang as high and as proudly as the famous. Van Gough would be strolling around holding his ear.

"My ear is killing me", he would say to a 1st grader.

"No wonder", the child replies. "You're holding it in your hand".

"Now isn't that silly!" responds Van Gough.

"If it were my ear I'd take it quite seriously". The child puts his arm around the artist and says, "Take two aspirins, go home, and paint your portrait". Van Gough wanders off muttering to himself. He turns and says, "Thank you".

"You're welcome" smiles the child.

The Vatican would be there and so would its ancient catacombs.

The Smithsonian would be there too. If you stood quietly you would hear the whispered conversations of the ghosts of history. The Wright brothers laughing about something their sister said about Kitty Hawk, Grant talking to Lee, and a WWII ace offering to take a 5th grader for a ride in his P-51 Mustang.

Machu Picchu would rise beyond the sky in all it's mysticism. Worn and weary Pizzaro and his men would be looking for the status of riches hidden in the secret empires of Peru.

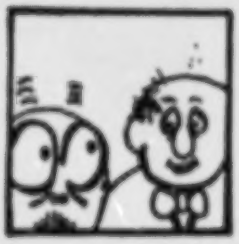
The Valley of the Kings would be there surrounded by death cliffs and dry monuments to forgotten glories. Beyond the horizon would be the Planet Dune. A giant sand worm would be slicing through the desert surface seeking spice.

Within the circle of Stonehenge Peter Rabbit would be talking to an impatient white rabbit.

A stuffed rattle snake would be sitting in a glass box on a wooden pedestal frozen between bites. Its tail could be activated by pushing a door bell.

There would be a basement with cold air seeping out from under a locked door. Something baneful and leathery would be on the other side softly scratching to get out.

There would be an attic with an unlocked door full of old clothes, trunks, family photograph albums and lovely junk. A small oval window to the north would look out over rural America exactly 100 years ago to the day, and everything and everybody there would be alive. To the East there would be another window looking out on life in a large city, and to the West would be Western America, cowboys, gamblers, Indians, and pioneer families seeking new hopes. The southern window would be made of kaleidoscope glass that could see into the future. It would be covered by oak shutters and locked with copper wire and sealed with red wax marked by the Fairy Queen.



There would be a bus depot for tourists from both this planet and others. Pale blue aliens with orange eyes wearing metallic bermuda shorts would share space with pensioners on their way to Lake Tahoe to gamble away their social security checks.

There would be all the equipment ever needed including a video-typewriter that would print out my thoughts as I think them, because I'm too lazy to write them. At the checkout desk would be a rainbow parrot that knew only 3 words. It would repeat them monotonously over and over. "Check it out, check it out, check it out".

The moon would be there and so would the dust storms of Mars. Poets would sit with kings and kings would share peanut butter sandwiches with children.

Children learning to read and children learning of life are basically the same concept. Knowledge is man. What he learns of himself, he learns of others. The binding facility, the quality of the heart within the educational process is the library.

If we accept the premise of administrative priorities, we accept the limits of a short sighted imagination. It is as McCaulay On John Dryden once said: "Their imagination resembled the wings of an ostrich. It will enable them to run, but never to soar". (4:128)

You may not have room for the Smithsonian or the facilities for a Brazilian rain forest, but there is no reason why you can't have an adequate library that provides for the needs of the educational process, and encourages children to keep their dreams. Show them what the heart can offer and allow them to fly.

We owe each other that much, and we owe the children more.

END

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